



Skeptics at NATO's 60th Anniversary: a Critique of the Criticism

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Introduction

"Everyone knows [NATO] is in terrible disarray just now. It says so in the papers."
—Meg Greenfield, 1980[2]

NATO's 60th Anniversary offered analysts, journalists and the public the opportunity to revisit the organization's successes and perceived crises over the years. To evaluate NATO's performance and put it into historical context, voters and policymakers need to understand not only what NATO has done wrong, but also what NATO has done—and continues to do—right.

In the interest of helping the public better to understand the organization, analyses commemorating the anniversary might have included historical perspectives offered in the books by Ian Thomas, Wallace Thies, Robert Jordan, Ryan Hendrickson, Alexandra Gheciu, and Ronald Asmus. These authors add dimension and depth to frequently prosaic assessments of the organization, and explain the dynamics of rhetoric, burden shifting, personality, socialization and adaptability/expansion within NATO. In particular, their works contrast with the mostly-black-and-white analyses of the institution at age 60 offered generally by journalists or policy analysts with a partisan agenda—many of whom failed to capture the dynamics of alliance cohesion with any insight. This article evaluates the biases, assumptions and arguments of these analyses and asserts that we have reason to be more hopeful of NATO's continued longevity and relevance.

Each of the thirteen NATO 60th Anniversary articles examined for this article contained subtle differences and emphases that arise from various sources analyzed below. Yet it is striking how similar the narratives on NATO have been, whether the analysis comes from the mainstream media or a think tank, from an American, Canadian, British or German perspective. The chief narrative for all can be summed up more or less as follows: "NATO has been successful over the years, but it has lost its common enemy, suffers from mission creep and European free loaders, is floundering in Afghanistan, and continues to irritate Russians by bringing in new Eastern European allies with great cost, risk and little benefit to the institution. Perhaps NATO has survived beyond its usefulness, and the time has come for it either to change or to disband."

The analyses did not examine why NATO has been successful, other than to attribute its achievements to forces beyond its control, i.e., the existence of the Soviet Union, its shared threat. None of the analyses portrayed NATO as doing anything positive, other than bringing in such new members as Albania and Croatia—though not all analysts agreed that such expansion is good for the alliance or the security of the United States.

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Yet all portrayed NATO as being in a bad way. One, the U.S. libertarian Cato Institute,^[3] argued that NATO is a failure, and the U.S. should leave. Several analyses in such British media outlets as *The Economist* (a centrist free market journal),^[4] *The BBC* (the official broadcaster),^[5] *The Guardian* (somewhat left)^[6] and *The Times Online*,^[7] in addition to an American commentary on *National Public Radio*^[8], made the case that NATO is becoming irrelevant and will fade away as more [supposedly] suitable international institutions take over its aging 20th century functions. Other analyses put out by the Foreign Policy Research Institute (FPRI),^[9] Heritage Foundation,^[10] *Los Angeles Times*,^[11] PBS,^[12] *GlobalPost.com*,^[13] *Winnipeg Free Press*,^[14] and *Der Spiegel*^[15] asserted that NATO could fail or fade away without a significant course correction, such as more active U.S. leadership or an expansion of mission sets to deal with new threats—a prospect other analysts deride as "mission creep."

Naturally the think-tank pieces from the libertarian Cato Institute and the conservative Heritage Foundation openly advocated a specific point of view and agenda in line with their right wing political ideology vis-à-vis NATO and the place of the United States in the international system generally. The reputation of neither institute rests on projecting an impartial outlook on issues, but rather on their ability to provide intellectual ammunition for the like-minded in Washington, DC to influence policy making where the imperative of producing burden-shifting rhetoric is at the top of the agenda. In contrast, most mainstream news organizations pride themselves on bias-free reporting; even such partisan outlets as *Fox News* proclaim their broadcasts to be "fair and balanced." However, the discernable narrative of each article indicates writers' pre-disposition to rely on all too familiar themes as the framework of their analyses as well as their collective tendency not to question so-called conventional wisdom pertaining to NATO which reveals itself to be anything other than profound, analytical or informed. No doubt it is possible that a journalist might have begun his or her NATO writing assignment with a Google search that yielded the Cato Institute's analysis on top, providing a reference list of all the reasons NATO should cease to exist and perhaps one's first introduction to NATO.

An author's bias is reflected in the selection and non-selection of news material, and the coverage of NATO's 60th Anniversary offered little about the institution's accomplishments beyond what many already knew—notwithstanding the author's own opinion. Thus, within the context of these reporting and analysis limitations, most of the thirteen NATO assessments reflected some form of four basic types of bias—narrative bias, expediency bias, temporal bias, and especially bad news bias. Narrative bias reflects a journalist's affinity for story writing, with antagonists and protagonists, clear cause and effect relationships, often enhanced with controversy and drama. "Narrative bias leads many journalists to create, and then hang on to, master narratives—set story lines with set characters who act in set ways. Once a master narrative has been set, it is very difficult to get journalists to see that their narrative is simply one way and not necessarily the correct or best way, of viewing people and events."^[16]

Next, news pieces reflect expediency bias when reporters find themselves rushed to meet publication deadlines, take reporting shortcuts and include the material obtained most easily versus information that requires more dredging or thoughtful consideration.^[17] Temporal bias is the tendency of the media to focus only on what is new—or to portray old developments as if they were new trends.^[18] Finally, bad news bias is reporters' tendency to report more bad news simply because it is more interesting.^[19] Taken together, these biases limit the scope and depth of coverage of issues and overlook insights that may not align with pre-conceived storylines.

Such biases overlap in the coverage of NATO, which has a well-established "plot" with familiar "characters" such as the United States, Britain, France, Germany, Russia and even Poland, all of whom represent stereotypes that need little introduction, so that in a time crunch, journalists can easily recycle material from this conventional NATO historical narrative. Meanwhile, reporting on the institution has the public interest challenge of being, first, an old (read: boring) institution and second, mostly a "good news" news story—considering its achievements over the years—as if mere age were not boring enough.

Of note, pieces geared toward elite audiences offered more detail and sophistication. These included the openly opinionated think-tank articles and those published in the *LA Times* and *The Economist*. The others, aimed at a general readership (or listeners, in the case of *NPR*), tended to reflect narrative, expediency, temporal and bad news biases more frequently.

For example, many pieces repeated overused NATO aphorisms, a tactic which allowed authors to pay due respect to the organization's 60-year past minus any historical analysis. These included references to NATO as "the most successful alliance in history," "established to keep the Russians out, the Americans in and the Germans down" (the legendary quote often attributed to Lord Ismay), and "won the Cold War without firing a single shot." Then the linear narrative moves on to 2001: "everything changed with 9/11," the impetus for the switch to a counter-terrorism mission. After that, the Iraq controversy in 2003 was marked by the refusal of Germany, France and Belgium to support Turkey's invocation of Article 5, repeatedly described as "one of the worst crises in the history of the alliance," although no analysis produced an example of any other crisis in NATO's 60-year history. While some analysts referred to NATO's occasional "stormy" relationship among its alliance partners—again without any examples or explanation—none in the NATO-is-doomed camp picked up on the fact that writers twenty years ago were writing the same predictions of its demise as they did. In fact, with the exception of the FPRI piece, none of the other articles offered historical analysis of NATO whatsoever beyond this clichéd sketch—a conspicuous omission given the topic.

To the extent that bias leads to analyses devoid of historical context, it is a problem for the public, policymakers and democracies. On the one hand, a thorough understanding of history informs the present. On the other, this understanding is crucial to evaluate agenda-driven claims that the present and future are or will be radically different from the past and thus require a specific course of action that diverges from current approaches. How leaders interpret history affects their ability to judge whether such claims are valid, and these judgments become part of policymaking. When the media cannot incorporate historical explanations into the assessment and context of contemporary issues, or merely cherry picks historical examples without analysis, this becomes a gap and potential blind spot in our understanding of issues, especially of NATO. For instance, NATO detractors frequently charge that the organization is too 20th century to handle the challenges of the 21st. Nevertheless as far as NATO is concerned, it may appear that the Cold War is too far gone, and the world has changed too much for that era to matter today. Yet the reason NATO continues to survive and thrive today is for the simple reason that it continues to fulfill members' security needs at a greatly reduced cost compared to what each would have to pay outside the alliance. For this reason, allies will remain committed to it, and that ongoing commitment translates into a strong and relevant institution able to address new threats collectively.

Nonetheless, the NATO 60th Anniversary analyses did not evaluate NATO on the basis of whether it meets members' requirements for security or the positive effect it has had on ensuring stability internationally, but rather on an assumed ideal of what the author believed NATO should be or should be doing. Undergirding these critiques appeared to be a conceptual paradigm of the Cold War NATO, one with a monolithic threat and a (commonly believed) unanimous "free world" approach to dealing with it, and that this new postwar NATO simply was not acting in line with the gold standard of norms and behavior that the venerable Cold War NATO had established. Rather than diagnose NATO as a healthy organization based on its remarkable ability to provide for the security of its members as it adapted to new threats and fulfilled significant new institution-building functions, analysts judged the organization's activities against the historical memory of what the Cold War NATO presumably was and would have done. The analyses tended to conclude that because NATO just has not been behaving like its old self, trouble must be on the horizon. As "evidence" of the new NATO's unhealthiness, analysts pointed to disagreements in the alliance over which threats are more dangerous, which missions ought to take precedence, and which members are not doing their share. Surely the old NATO would not have had these problems, is the unwritten assumption.

Of the thirteen analyses, the Cato Institute viewed NATO in the harshest light. Ted Galen Carpenter, vice president for defense and foreign policy studies at Cato, opened his policy analysis "NATO at 60: A Hollow Alliance" with the assertion that NATO shows "mounting signs of trouble" without a common enemy to keep it together and will likely be incapable of addressing the 21st century's international challenges.[\[20\]](#) According to Carpenter,

NATO is no longer an effective or, in most cases, even a credible security alliance. Certainly NATO in its current form does not advance the security and well-being of the American republic. It is time to terminate this increasingly dysfunctional alliance—or at the very least, extricate the United States from it.[\[21\]](#)

He goes on to argue that expanding the organization to include former Warsaw Pact nations is a mistake because the militaries of these newest members are so small that they would have to rely on the United States to defend them if they were attacked. He hints that such a scenario is not outside the realm of possibility, given Russia's consternation over NATO expansion into its old sphere of influence, as well as its recent military actions in Georgia. He further asserts that admitting these countries is not worth the damage it has done to relations with Russia.

In "NATO at 60: Reassessment Time" an article published by FPRI, former State Department diplomat, David T. Jones, raises additional concerns about enlargement of the alliance:

NATO expansion has always been controversial. Will new members strengthen the Alliance's unity and enhance its military capability? Or will they be sources of vulnerability and exacerbate the bureaucratic difficulties associated with the requirement for "consensus" (unanimity) in decision making? Will new members draw the Alliance into domestic or bilateral disputes as the endless Greek-Turk infighting has done?[\[22\]](#)

Jones poses the questions in terms of either-or outcomes, the ideal world versus the more numerous worst-case-scenarios, and thus leaves the reader with doubts as to whether the inclusion of new members is a good idea. Like other analyses, his draws heavily on the assumed downsides of NATO expansion while omitting potential benefits beyond the possibility it could "strengthen unity" and "enhance military capability," outcomes which he implies are overly optimistic juxtaposed against the several conceivable drawbacks he lists. Jones then expresses doubts about whether Europeans actually would defend newest NATO members were Russia to attack. Both Carpenter and Jones point to the conflict in Georgia in which NATO members did little to stop Russia's military offensive and conclude that this indicates NATO allies would not be willing to go to war with Russia to defend new members.[\[23\]](#) The criticism is directed at Europeans, though both analysts insinuate that coming to Georgia's or another Eastern European country's rescue would not be in the interest of the United States, either.

Meanwhile, in a milder variation of the longstanding (and so far incorrect) prediction that NATO could not withstand the loss of a common enemy, analyses in *The Economist* and *BBC* underscored the divide between NATO allies who view Russia as the primary threat—the U.S. and former Warsaw Pact nations—and those who did not—such as Germany and France. "NATO has lost the glue that once held it together," quoted *BBC's* diplomatic correspondent, Jonathan Marcus, from an unnamed NATO official.[\[24\]](#) The reports noted disagreement among members over whether NATO's focus should be counterterrorism or its old adversary. As it grapples with "an identity crisis that has lingered since the cold war ended," wrote *The Economist*,

NATO is losing its role as the main forum for strategic dialogue between America and Europe. The economic crisis is being dealt with in the G20; the threat of a nuclear Iran is being handled by a small club of six powers; the security of energy supplies from Russia is better addressed by the European Union; and intelligence co-operation against terrorism is done bilaterally.[\[25\]](#)

In other words, according to the author, the lack of clarity over its true adversary has led to an erosion of its relevance to address more internationally pressing issues and someday will no longer be the primary platform for American/European diplomacy.

While the alliance reacts and adapts to a changing world, analysts disagree on whether NATO is supposedly floundering, failing or becoming irrelevant because of its expanding mission sets—a.k.a. "mission creep"—or if expanding mission sets are the solution to its assumed potential demise. Articulating the mission creep view, defence editor of *The Times*, Michael Evans writes,

The logistical nightmare for a two-day summit neatly sums up Nato's present confusion. It has become so multi-tasked, so desperate to get involved in everything from cyber warfare to anti-piracy and missile defence, let alone a hugely draining and complex campaign in Afghanistan, that it has lost its way. It has never settled into the new security era that followed the fall of the Iron Curtain and has ceased to be a cohesive and united alliance.[26]

Whereas Henry Chu, writing for *The LA Times* argues,

Influential voices, many of them in the U.S., also argue that the alliance cannot just go back to old-time basics if it hopes to remain relevant. Instead, it must redefine security to take into account new threats unknown only a decade ago: terrorist strikes on a large scale, perhaps with nuclear or biological weapons; hackers who try to disrupt vital computer networks; attacks on oil and gas pipelines; the melting of the polar icecaps and a potential scramble for natural resources there.[27]

But whether they viewed mission expansion as the problem or the solution, analysts used these arguments to assert that NATO is going down the wrong path, either because it cannot focus on a primary mission or because it needs to adapt to new security challenges that were not present when NATO was first created. To underscore their perspectives, analysts frequently point to NATO operations in Afghanistan as the alliance's "greatest test so far" and a prime example of mission creep that has led to the possibility of failure.

Others analysts like Carpenter draw attention to Afghanistan and the paltry numbers of European boots on the ground there, beyond the British and Dutch, as another reason for the U.S. to reconsider its NATO membership. This example of unequal burden sharing is a common critique in NATO 60th Anniversary analyses. As Jones complains:

Our [American] tin-cup begging for further NATO force commitments has been the political equivalent of attempting to induce recalcitrant mules to carry heavy burdens up a steep mountain. And the protocols limiting military action by many NATO contingents are the combat equivalent of a sports team in Belgium saying it will only play on sunny days.[28]

Reflecting a recurrent Canadian frustration, Gwynne Dyer of the *Winnipeg Free Press* noted, "Only three countries with a total population of under 100 million people—Britain, Canada and Denmark—have suffered almost two-thirds of all NATO's fatal casualties in Afghanistan. France, Germany, Italy, Spain and Poland have altogether lost fewer soldiers killed than Canada alone." [29] In a different spin, authors writing for *Der Spiegel* reported how little German troops contributed to actual fighting in Afghanistan, as if to highlight a national embarrassment in this situation.[30] Meanwhile the United States spends 4% of its GDP on defense, while France, Britain, Greece and Bulgaria only spend 2%.[31] Carpenter's recommendation to this European "free riding" is to remove American troops from Europe to compel allies to do a more equitable share. In sum, Carpenter sees problems with Eastern European NATO allies in their capacity to

inflame Russia and with the Western European NATO allies in their failure to commit more resources.

These critiques lead to questions the analysts, with the exception of Carter, did not try to answer: namely, after 60 years, is being in NATO still worth it? Is it worthwhile to deal with allies who may not enhance NATO's military capability significantly, could inflame Russia, and do not pull their weight? Despite the thirteen analyses that viewed NATO as being in bad shape, Thomas, Thies, Jordan, Hendrickson, Gheciu and Asmus offer explanations and some assurances to those who portray NATO as a failure from which the United States should walk away, an alliance whose relevance is eroding, or an institution that must change or face the possibility of failure and irrelevance.

Despite suggestions to the contrary, one way NATO has validated its importance is through expansion. This process of helping former Warsaw Pact countries join NATO has had a significant impact on the stability, modernization and democratization of Europe, benefits that override the issue of how much or how little military might they may add to the organization. For instance, in its focus on the raw numbers of troops and munitions new members add to NATO's stockpile, the CATO Institute analysis overlooks the positive security outcomes of incorporating Central and Eastern European nations into the NATO framework since the process began over fifteen years ago. In addition, none of the other NATO Anniversary analyses contained any meaningful discussion to explain why these countries originally were invited to join the organization and why they continue to seek membership. A thorough look at NATO expansion and its history reveals a more upbeat picture of the health of the organization and its ongoing contributions.

NATO expanded eastward because former Warsaw Pact countries looked to NATO for security, while NATO members came to view the organization as an effective means to ensure stability on the continent by incorporating former adversaries into the alliance. Today, a mostly peaceful, secure and unified Europe is taken for granted such that these conditions might appear to have occurred naturally on their own, without any help beyond the raised bar of European Union admission standards. However, like the security guarantees that contributed to the prosperity of 1950s Europe, NATO has had much to do with Europe's present well-being. As Ronald Asmus writes in *Opening NATO's Door*, "Originally established as an instrument to defend Western Europe from a Soviet threat, NATO [in the 1990s] was being recast into a tool to promote Europe's unification, manage security across the continent, and defend common transatlantic values and interests beyond its borders."[\[32\]](#) In fact meeting NATO entrance criteria now has become Eastern European countries' typical path toward EU membership, as the process to qualify for NATO establishes the democratic foundations from which countries can go on to meet more rigorous EU institutional requirements.

Unfortunately, journalism's bad-news bias dispossesses NATO of some well-deserved credit for its stabilization and institution-building roles, and to neglect this success misses a primary reason today's organization remains vital as well as relevant. At the same time, if one further acknowledges that the stable, democratic Europe—which NATO has helped create—contributes to international stability and in this way advances "the security and well-being of the American Republic," as Carpenter puts it,[\[33\]](#) the alliance is worth American commitment and is not failing or floundering.

To put NATO's expansion and current performance into historical context, Asmus cited three reasons in his book why the Clinton Administration in the 1990s originally advocated allowing new members.[\[34\]](#) First, Clinton saw the potential role NATO could have in ensuring peace, democracy and security throughout the entire European continent. Germany, whose Chancellor Kohl was likewise an early champion of NATO expansion, showcased how Europe and the rest of the world had benefitted by incorporating the country as a former adversary into NATO and other European institutions. As mentioned, NATO also had been one of the keys to the health and

prosperity of post-war Europe, which rebuilt under the institution's security umbrella and resolved potential conflicts through the NATO practice and norm of consensus building. The United States and Germany came to view NATO as an institution that could stabilize and rehabilitate former Warsaw Pact nations, as well. Meanwhile, German policy makers starting with Defense Minister Volker Ruhe, saw NATO enlargement as a means to buffer Germany from real and potential post-communism volatility outside its eastern border, particularly in light of the then-recent destructiveness of the Yugoslavian conflict.^[35]

Second, Clinton viewed NATO expansion as a way to update and re-commit to NATO on the basis of the oft-repeated rhetoric of "shared values" as well as interests. A guarantee of stability and democracy throughout the European continent, in addition to a reinforced transatlantic relationship in the form of NATO, also allowed the United States to focus next on other global concerns and assert U.S. interests through its bolstered alliance. Furthermore, as Ian Thomas in *The Promise of Alliance* notes, NATO allies also interpreted the Cold War as a "moral victory" and brought leaders to the conclusion that NATO's function should be to extend peace and security throughout the continent.^[36] This vision then shaped Clinton's third reason—that an expanded and re-invigorated NATO would anchor the U.S. firmly in Europe, an explicit rejection of those who saw the end of the Cold War as an opportunity for the country to disengage from the continent and take a more isolationist or unilateralist outlook. NATO enlargement, as the Clinton Administration saw it, stood for America's commitment to its transatlantic relationship as well as to its international leadership role.^[37]

In essence then, the original (American) reasoning for NATO to welcome new members had little to do with making NATO's military might stronger, but rather to situate nascent European democracies into the interlocking transatlantic security arrangement to ensure their survival as democracies and guard against continental instability—all while it enhanced U.S. primacy in the West. But as the idea to incorporate these countries into the transatlantic security framework evolved, the Clinton Administration began to recognize an opportunity to deepen stability within the region beyond simply opening NATO's doors.

The Administration developed a so-called "golden carrot," a list of liberal democratic standards applicants had to meet before being considered for entry into NATO. In addition to the requirement that potential entrants prove their strategic value to the organization, these standards included having a free-market economy, non-disputed borders, civilian control of the military, a military working toward compatibility with the alliance, and, of course, a democratic system.^[38] With these criteria, motivated countries had the security incentive to reform to Western standards as soon as they could manage it. In her book *NATO in the "New Europe,"* Alexandra Gheciu provides two case studies on the effect NATO membership requirements have had on the systems of the Czech Republic and Romania and concludes the organization has had a dramatic socialization impact on the conduct, performance and reform of former communist countries.

Beyond promulgating liberal democratic norms, NATO has made the continent more stable simply through its entrance requirement that old border squabbles must be resolved—an age-old reason for the start of wars. Jones misses this point when he ponders whether new members "will draw the Alliance into domestic or bilateral disputes as the endless Greek-Turk infighting has done." In fact, it is probable officials used the Greek-Turk situation as an example of what not to bring into the alliance when they first thought through the criteria for expanded membership. The status of Moldova's application illustrates how this condition cannot be waived, as its Individual Partnership Plan for entry remains stalled over its border disputes in the Transdnistria region.

To revisit the reasons Central and Eastern Europeans first were interested in NATO membership, it was not for the same reasons the Clinton Administration viewed it advantageous to accept them. Perhaps in a blur between rhetoric and flattery, the leaders of Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary instead first articulated their shared desire for NATO entry on the basis of symbolism—that the organization stood for Western democratic values and belonging to it meant

a commitment to those values, a rejection of totalitarianism, and a declaration of their countries' rightful place in the European family of nations. As the Czech leader Vaclav Havel said to Clinton, "In our values and spirit, we are part of Western Europe."^[39] However, Polish leader Lech Walesa offered a more realist view: "We are all afraid of Russia."^[40] Both the proponents of NATO expansion and those who wanted in feared a closing window of opportunity: while Administration officials argued NATO must act quickly to let in former Warsaw Pact countries before they resentfully turned away from a West that ignored their overtures, Czech, Polish and Hungarian leaders believed they had to act quickly before Russia changed its mind on letting them join NATO.^[41]

Much has been written about the insult that NATO expansion has caused Russia, a country that regards Central and Eastern Europe its traditional sphere of influence. In fact the phrase "sphere of influence" might be re-phrased as "buffer zone," a term that harkens back to the days when Stalin viewed these countries as providing a cushion between the USSR and such potential European attackers as Germany. Analyses like the one from the CATO Institute that argue NATO should stop expanding because this upsets Russia ignore the perspectives of countries that do not want to be considered part of Russia's "sphere," a notion that clearly contradicts post-imperialist interpretations of sovereignty and national free will. Arguably, the democratic-socialization and institution-building efforts that are the hallmarks of NATO expansion outweigh the emotion-based arguments of "don't do that because it makes me very angry." And although some analysts look at Russia's military actions in Georgia as an indication it could do the same in other Eastern European countries, forcing NATO to respond and Americans to have to risk their lives for a country they cannot find on a map (which surely would not be the first time), notably Russia has not attacked a NATO member. Even Carpenter concedes the point made by columnist George Will, "If Georgia were in NATO, would NATO now be at war with Russia? More likely, Russia would not be in Georgia."^[42] It is likely Russia's Georgian offensive did more to persuade new NATO applicants to hurry and make changes necessary to join the alliance than it did to dissuade them from wanting to do so. It could be argued that new members' fear of Russia brings a certain renewed vitality to the alliance.

Not all NATO members share the concern over Russia, and given these differences of opinion, the other concern Jones raises about NATO expansion is its potential to delay consensus building and the implication that this weakens the effectiveness of the alliance. However, differences among allies on recent issues have occurred most notably among more powerful founding members, rather than with former Warsaw Pact members. Moreover, critics of NATO who argue its ability to serve U.S. interests is in decline often ignore the fact that new members have not caused more disagreement in the alliance but rather have tended to align with U.S. positions, thus balancing alliance debates in the United States' favor. As an example, most of the analyses highlighted the NATO crisis that occurred when France, Belgium and Germany did not back Turkey's Article 5 request for defense help in opposition to the United States, whose most unwavering supporters were new NATO allies. In fact, Gheciu notes the often emphatic commitment of new members to uphold the transatlantic relationship and support missions perceived as building democracy, as the overthrow of Saddam Hussein was viewed at the time.^[43]

In their inadequate historical review of NATO history, the analyses failed to capture the diversity of views in NATO over the past 60 years and how allies have not always seen eye-to-eye on issues ranging from the employment strategy and basing of nuclear weapons, Vietnam and the American anti-communist crusade to the degree the Soviet Union should be held accountable for human rights violations. Yet the alliance survived and the requirement of consensus for collective action has forced allies to compromise and come to agreement such that when consensus did not occur it was labeled a NATO "crisis." Ryan Hendrickson's *Diplomacy and War at NATO* and Robert Jordan's *Norstad: Cold War NATO Supreme Commander* highlight how the roles of leadership, personality and the art of diplomacy and negotiation have achieved alliance agreement and buy-in over the years. In some ways, NATO has spoiled the world, as historical

memory glosses over what a real international crisis meant in a Europe prior to NATO: mass mobilization of armies on the march to the battlefield.

NATO's expanding mission sets and the requirement for consensus also have driven allies to commit to shared understanding and commitment to problem resolution over a wider range of international challenges. This has the benefit of achieving a collective response as well as lent international legitimacy to these responses. Meanwhile, analysts who argue that because NATO continues to expand its mission set that it is "losing its way" overlook the institution's remarkable capacity to adapt to new situations as it draws on strengths developed over the 60 years its members have been working together.

The analyses as a whole inadequately explored this trend, nor addressed the question of whether NATO is expanding its operations due to an identity crisis, or because it is reacting to a security vacuum that no other military force can manage? The latter answer appears more likely. Arguably it has taken on these new missions because no other organization has the capability to do what NATO does, which includes having become the primary military and resource support to the Security Council/UN operations and thus a principal maintainer of international peace and security. Furthermore, analysts who regard expanding mission sets as "mission creep" or proof that NATO has "lost its way" overlook post-Cold War NATO rhetoric committing the alliance to address any threat on which its allies—through the mechanism of consensus—agree to take action.^[44] This is not the classic mission creep example of Somalia in which feeding the hungry became a mission to stake out bad actors. If NATO members collectively agree to take action on something they believe affects their security, this is within the legitimate realm the alliance, indeed its *raison d'être*.

During the 1990-91 Gulf War, NATO first revealed how its structures could have utility in operations outside the bounds of its treaty. NATO allies, in support of UN operations in Kuwait, drew on military, policy, and communications structures developed over years through the alliance, even while NATO itself was only officially involved in protecting Turkey from an invasion by Iraq.^[45] In the early 1990s NATO involvement in Bosnia served as a precedent for greater non-Article 5 peacekeeping and conflict resolution operations. NATO stepped in to support UN peacekeeping operations following the ineffectual United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) efforts to protect civilians and enforce sanctions.^[46] By 2000, NATO was leading two UN peacekeeping operations, the Kosovo Force and the Stabilization Force in Bosnia.^[47] Currently, of course, NATO leads the International Security Assistance Force, responsible for establishing security Afghanistan, its first operation outside of Europe.

As former UN secretary-general Kofi Annan underscored, "No amount of good intentions can substitute for the fundamental ability to project credible force if complex peacekeeping, in particular, is to succeed."^[48] Even with the challenges of "unfair" burden sharing, member nations' investments into NATO over the decades in training, exercises, equipment, systems, troops and weapons have created an effective force that no other multinational military organization can match.^[49] To attempt to raise any force of equivalent strength and competence for UN operations would be costly, time consuming and unjustifiably redundant. As the UN has depended on NATO for much of its military strength, beyond its incorporation of new members, UN operations have given NATO a second lease on life in the post-Cold War era, proving NATO is not only still relevant in the current global situation, but a crucial element to its stable upkeep.

If it is true, as *The Economist* has charged, that, "NATO is losing its role as the main forum for strategic dialogue between America and Europe," this does not mean the organization is faltering. Instead this should be viewed as a positive indication that the international community since the end of the Cold War has continued to fine-tune its approach to specific international challenges by creating more specialized and appropriate platforms to address them. Notably, *The Economist* does not mention one organization that many assumed would compete with NATO for security prominence in Europe: The European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP). The ESDP is the

European Union's answer to several issues that converged in the late the late 1990s—the limited capability of Europeans to respond to the Balkan conflict without U.S. assistance via NATO, U.S. prodding Europe to take more responsibility for its own defense, as well as the emergence of the EU and its desire to back up its desire to "be an actor on the world stage" backed by some military force.^[50] However, its 1998 Saint Malo Joint Declaration makes clear ESDP has no intentions to compete with NATO, rather to supplement it.^[51]

The main thesis of Wallace Thies' book *Friendly Rivals* goes far to explain why it is not in the interest of Europeans for ESDP to compete with NATO and why NATO, as the premier security force in the world, will continue to expand to perform new mission sets in the absence of a force of comparable capability. For ESDP to compete with NATO would require a significant increase in defense spending by Europeans whose defense needs are already adequately met by NATO and conveniently supplemented by the United States' contributions. As Thies writes, "The European allies supposedly engaged in the work of building ESDI [ESDP's predecessor] have often acted in ways that suggest that they view it ... as a way of substituting declarations of good intent for the kinds of actions that might require them to spend real money to acquire real armed forces."^[52]

Rather than spend on defense, Thies points out that European nations would prefer to spend their budgets on social programs, but because they value what NATO offers them, they often engage in burden-shifting strategies, as each under-contributing country attempts to deflect attention away from its own deficient defense contribution to NATO. The current financial crisis has put yet more pressure on politicians to relieve economic strain with welfare programs. Because raising taxes during an economic downturn to pay for such programs is politically unpopular, military spending becomes harder to justify, particularly when allies are covering much of these costs.

In addition to the challenge of getting Europeans to spend more on equipment and armaments, is the challenge of getting them to share in more of the risks. NATO Anniversary analyses accurately reflect the disinterest NATO allies have in handing over more of their troops to serve in harm's way in Afghanistan, while the United States and others continue to protest that their allies are not doing enough. However, Thies puts into perspective the NATO anniversary analyses that cited unfair burden sharing as one more reason the alliance was "in trouble" by pointing out that burden shifting is not new and has been going on since the institution began. In fact, burden shifting is the main reason NATO will remain the dominant military organization for Europe; the costs are too high for Europeans to seriously consider an alternative.

Therefore the outcry over most European member states not contributing enough troops to Afghanistan may be reason for irritation, but not for concluding the alliance is at risk of falling apart. Had the analyses looked at the organization from a different perspective, perhaps they might have pointed out reasons to cheer that, thanks to NATO, Europeans have sent anyone at all to Afghanistan, given that many or most European publics regard it as a U.S. war and do not necessarily view failed states as a direct challenge to their own security. The CATO Institute's logic is most baffling in this regard: because European allies are not pulling their weight, Carpenter argues, the U.S. should leave NATO. But if the United States leaves, then it would either have to go through the lengthy and inefficient process of negotiating a series of bi-lateral alliances in the hopes others would sign up to help in Afghanistan, or have no European allies at all to do anything there.

Because ultimately, the reason NATO has continued longevity and relevance is that being a NATO member, as well as maintaining and expanding the NATO alliance, continues to be worth dealing with its shortcomings. NATO's purpose is to fulfill the security needs of its members, and so long as it does that, it is not failing, floundering or in danger of losing relevance. 60 years ago, the security need was to unite against Soviet aggression. Today, threats are more varied, and each NATO member grades the threat danger level differently. Through media biases and a misunderstanding of NATO's history, analysts misconstrue the health of the organization by

judging it on the wrong criteria: whether members should have a standardized view of the threat and a standardized response to the threat. Unfortunately, this meant that the evolving, adapting and healthy nature of NATO went largely unmentioned and uncelebrated at its 60th Anniversary.

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